

n6        MEMORY, HABIT, AND  
IMITATION

hunger, and of exposure becomes more apparent, man has become more peaceful as his civilization has advanced.

Habit is the foundation of all that is conservative in our ideas and conduct. Representing, as it does, a response to an impulse of life. its action affords happiness, and it is accordingly able to form inclinations out of conduct or pursuits which have been forced upon us by circumstances. In some of its forms labour must be naturally distasteful. But by repetition it may become a dominating passion. We may wonder how mankind can tolerate such existences as that of a fisherman afloat throughout the winter on the North Sea, or that of a miner or a slaughterer. But to those who earn their livelihood in these fashions their lives have become habitual, and are therefore not merely tolerable but even pleasant. So is society supplied with willing servants to minister in the utmost hardship to its luxuries. Habit—not a desire for gain—is the force which consolidates trades and professions. To those who first enter them they are generally not more attractive than is to young children attendance at church. On the other hand habit weakens the spontaneity to which we are urged by our impulse towards change, and since it reinforces itself by repetition, it tends to become the more powerful of the two,

especially in adult life. If accepted undeviatingly as a guide of conduct it may render us altogether incapable of independent thought or action. We may see this tendency very clearly in the effects of such a habitual routine as is imposed by military discipline. It is notorious that soldiers who return to civil life are deficient in resourcefulness, and it